

# A JOB FOR THE A TEAM...

Experiences and strategies on  
building community  
accountability and creating  
awareness structures.

xxx

the a team, 2014

[awareness.noblogs.org](http://awareness.noblogs.org)

write us!

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this is a draft version of this zine  
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## Trigger Warning

This zine contains  
discussion of sexualized violence,  
racism, the use of substances in  
leftist spaces, and  
everyday forms of  
oppression, in many forms.

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First of all, we'd like to say straight away that we, the authors, don't really consider ourselves 'experts' on the topic of awareness. It's an idea that we have seen floating around in the leftist scene for the past few years and we've observed a lot of different attempts to realize this concept. We took part ourselves in a number of them. But after critically reflecting on the efforts of our own groups and others around us, we've also noticed that sometimes just what 'awareness' means is actually a little bit vague, even to those people who are trying to realize it. This maybe isn't so surprising. The impulse to create more accountability in our communities is a really important one, but figuring out the nitty gritty of how you can actually do that is really complicated sometimes!

We are writing this now because we noticed that when we tried to look for resources to help us along that path we didn't really know where to turn. Some amazing people have done a lot of (ongoing) work on things like supporting survivors of sexualized violence and creating processes of transformative justice in our communities (check out the resources at the end for some of our favorites). But for us it is crucial not just to deal with violence after it has already happened. These and other kinds of attacks happen in the broader context of social environments defined by really oppressive forms of behavior, which also comes out in 'smaller' everyday interactions. Calling someone a 'bitch', laughing at racist jokes, touching someone without asking – for us there isn't so much sense in distinguishing between 'serious' and 'tolerable' forms of bullshit behavior because the small, annoying forms of oppression and the permanently traumatizing ones are all bound up with each other in a broader structure defining what kind of behavior is acceptable in society and in our own communities. If we really want to make our communities accountable we have to already begin by attacking all the littler forms of oppression which are more easily 'normalized'.

Of course, taking on oppression *everywhere*, in *every* form is a huge task and it's hard to know where to begin. But we like to think that although some ideas seem too daunting to ever be fully realized, it doesn't mean we can't find lots of concrete ways to start pushing reality in their direction. We still aren't sure quite how to realize our aspirations and we definitely don't have a flawless guide to help you through this process but this zine is a collection of some things we have personally come up with through our own attempts at creating an atmosphere of accountability in the 'scenes' we are a part of. It's by no means complete, though, and we recognize that by trying to discuss problems concretely we ended up focusing, maybe too much, on the context of parties, which is of course only one of a perhaps limitless possible range of situations in which we think awareness teams make sense. Mostly we see the zine as an invitation to start more conversations on how it might be possible to create spaces in which we can be around each other, all feel comfortable and work actively, through our everyday actions, against all the fucked up forms of behavior and structural oppression that society has taught us and which can be so hard to unlearn.

### // More Zines ?

In this zine you'll find a few of our thoughts on awareness, but we discovered that actually we still have a lot left we'd like to say about it ... and we'd be even more interested in what other people have to say! We already received a few submissions for this first zine (thank you, wonderful people!) and we'd be happy to get to work again already gathering new submissions for another zine on the topic of awareness, community accountability and safeR space. Please send us your own experiences, manifestos, scathing and systematic critiques of everything we wrote here, a drawing of you performing feminist self defence, or whatever you may feel is related to the topic.



the a team

**Get in touch!** : [nouvellesarmes@riseup.net](mailto:nouvellesarmes@riseup.net)

This zine and future zines are also available for free download, and hopefully soon in other languages, at:

<http://awareness.noblogs.org/>

# why awareness?

The folks at **INCITE**, we think, explain the idea of community accountability pretty well:

"Community accountability can be about directly addressing violence as well creating on-going practices within our relationships and broader networks that are opposed to oppression and violence. Networks of people can develop a community accountability politic by engaging in anti-violence/anti-oppression education, building relationships based on values of safety, respect, and self-determination, and nurturing a culture of collective responsibility, connection, and liberation. Community accountability is not just a reaction - something that we do when someone behaves violently - it is also proactive - something that is ongoing and negotiated among everyone in the community. This better prepares us to address violence if and when it happens."

- INCITE community accountability toolkit (see resources)

We understand the work of an awareness team in this sense. It is one tool for empowering ourselves and our communities to take responsibility when shit happens. We want to introduce the idea of accountability to those around us and to normalize certain behaviors: actively supporting people who've had negative experiences, making it easier to call out bullshit actions and statements whenever they happen by normalizing certain spaces and actions. Sometimes, some creep keeps making comments about your ass but it can seem like a big deal to call them out on it and you'd rather just let it be. It shouldn't be so hard to do this! We want to make it easier, in the spaces we create, for people to feel safe and comfortable confronting the behavior they don't like.

# Why a safer space?

In the leftist scene, and in life in general, we inhabit a lot of different spaces: the spaces in which we meet each other, dance and plan political actions together, imagine impossible liberatory futures and laugh together. But right now, realistically, most of those spaces are not really safe for all of the people in them. At the average party, people who aren't comfortable with being around intoxicated people are going to feel pretty unwell. A lot of the time, people who are perceived by society as female and/or as something outside of cis just accept that, if they want to go out and dance, they are going to have to deal with at least one person making comments on their body and verbally aggressing them in the course of an evening.


## Privilege of Unawareness

'Why can't we just have fun?' In conversations we've had about the necessity or usefulness of an awareness team, this question has come up time and again. The people who ask it are generally unaware that anything goes on at parties other than a bunch of people getting together for some good, clean fun. This might seem shocking to many people, whose experiences of parties often include unwanted advances, nonconsensual touching, predatory glances, being followed, racist remarks, or more general feelings of being unwanted, unwelcome or marginalized. But this is privilege in its most concentrated form: not only do some of us not have to deal with certain problems, we are also entitled to ignore their existence entirely (and tell people to shut up when they don't). We call this the privilege of unawareness and for us, an awareness team should tackle precisely this: the way in which we erase each other's experiences of structural social oppression by downplaying, denying and devaluing them. One of the first steps towards combatting and, at least to some degree, solving these problems, is dragging people who don't have to deal with them to the recognition that, at the very least, they exist. This is about creating spaces and, hopefully, communities that are accountable for their shit.



# Creating a Space

**A**ny social situation is a kind of a battlefield: a struggle between social structures, desires, personal histories, bodies and dreams. The depth and complexity of the interactions between all of these factors is basically limitless, but this is the terrain we navigate everyday. The idea of an awareness team – what we want to be aware of - is the ways in which social dynamics become concrete in a given situation (for our purposes: a party). If we want to create spaces that are not just for straight, cis, white men then this requires actively contesting the space and defending it! Our hope is not only to recognize – and raise consciousness of – oppressive dynamics, but also to confront them openly and honestly: to set our own bodies, dreams and desires against those which have been imposed upon us and to win. Obviously, this is a long and difficult fight and the world probably can't be saved one party at a time. But we have to start somewhere, so why not with ourselves, in our spaces, right now.



## A Note About Terminology

In this zine, we have decided to use the terms 'affected person' and 'perpetrator.' We are not totally happy with the word 'perpetrator', since the term has a legal sound, and in creating an awareness team we are definitely not trying to recreate some form of the justice system. Still, we weren't able to come up with a better term and for us it's important, when talking about people who have been called out, not to use terms like 'the accused' or the 'alleged' perpetrator, which cast doubt on the person who is doing the calling out and on their perception of reality. We'll explain this more latter (see the section 'Power of Definition'), but for now, just bear in mind that we are trying not to reproduce the victim-blaming and denial that affected people often face.

## **GENERAL CONCEPT OF AWARENESS**

An awareness team is a group of people interested in actively making a space safer. Especially in a party setting, it is quite unlikely that everyone will know each other, much less that it will be possible for them to come to a collective agreement on what types of behavior are acceptable for everyone. Awareness teams cannot realistically hope to fix structural oppression during an evening of drinking or even to prevent oppressive behavior from taking place for that length of time in the average party setting.

So, what can a group of people trying to actively intervene in such a space actually hope to achieve? Unfortunately, such a group can't make this space truly 'safe' for everyone in it - if there is substance consumption, that will already be enough to make many people feel unsafe. But an awareness team can try to facilitate anti-oppression work and, specifically, the process of holding people accountable for their actions and supporting people affected by oppressive behaviors.

## **WHAT WE UNDERSTAND BY 'ANTI OPPRESSION'**

Anti-oppression means seeking to recognize, understand and actively work against and destroy the structures of oppression that exist in our society. These structures can include racism, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism/cis supremacy, homophobia, trans\*misogyny, ableism, ageism, mental illness shaming, classism, ace erasure, slut-shaming, sizeism, neurotypicalism, and, unfortunately, many, many more. We've all grown up around these things and internalized them

to different degrees, and working towards living with each other in non-oppressive ways isn't a simple decision - it's one that requires lots and lots of work and dedication, constantly questioning ourselves and accepting some pretty uncomfortable truths! What anti-oppression is not about is moralistically singling out individuals as 'racist', 'sexist', etc. Assigning individuals personal guilt for social problems may make you feel better (especially if it distracts you from your own complicity), but it is unlikely to move a serious fight against oppression forward. Morality tends to reproduce the problem it identifies, distracting us from social structures by focussing on the failings of individuals. Anti-oppression work is about being accountable for our actions, actively seeking to recognize the ways in which we have all internalized these bullshit forms of behavior and calling out and taking action against oppression wherever we see it.

## **POWER OF DEFINITION**

For us, this idea is completely central to how we understand the work of an awareness team. The idea is that only the person who experienced an oppressive, aggressive, or uncomfortable situation is capable of defining what happened and what the correct response should be. The awareness team is there to listen to them, to talk to them and work with them on figuring out how they would like to respond to the situation.

**It is not the job of the awareness team to define what the correct response is or to tell the affected person how they should feel about it!**



It is also not the role of the awareness team to act as detectives and try to figure out what ‘really’ happened. Just accept what the affected person is telling you. It was probably really hard for them to tell you about what happened in the first place. It’s possible that people lie but, in our experience, this basically never happens. Instead, what happens the majority of the time is that people don’t feel comfortable enough to speak about something happening. So, if someone is trusting you enough to share a hard experience with you do not delegitimize what they are saying by questioning the facts of what happened.

**BE BIASED!**

**TAKE SIDES!**

We don’t understand the role of the awareness team as being that of a ‘mediator’. We like the concept of ‘partiality’ (or taking sides), which is closely related to the idea of ‘power of definition’. Partiality means that people supporting an affected person should in no way question their perception of how the situation was for them. It also means that we very clearly state that we are on the affected person’s side. Only the affected person is able to define what happened to them.

This is important for a number of reasons, one of which is that it counteracts the status quo, which denies the perceptions of people who have experienced oppression, blames victims and privileges the perpetrator’s presentation of the situation. When we ‘take the side’ of an affected person, we reject the way in which society normalizes oppression and casts doubt on the experiences of affected people everyday and so oppose structural relationships of power.

In *Antisexistischen Praxen 2007*, the authors try to distinguish partiality, which they see as a very practical and political form of solidarity, from mere sympathy:

"A position of partiality cannot use sympathy as its primary resource. Sympathy puts the affected person into the role of helplessness and denies them the ability to act autonomously. But it is precisely this feeling of powerlessness and helplessness which should be overcome through support work. ...[partiality is a form of political action and practical solidarity aimed at opposing patriarchal structures."  
(and, we would add, all other structures of oppression!)

It's important to keep in mind who we are there for and that our first responsibility is not neutral mediation. We can't be neutral when it comes to people's boundaries being crossed! Neutrality means pressuring the affected person, at every step, to justify themselves. Again, an awareness team is not a criminal court. Your job is not discovering some supposed facts behind people's perceptions, it is supporting the affected person. If you are not explicitly in solidarity with the affected person, you are implicitly supporting the perpetrator. There is no middle ground.

If we don't take the affected person's side, it's also very difficult to figure out how to act at all. We like what some people wrote in a flier for a party at Köpi:

"Power of definition and partiality are strategies to prevent it from automatically being the people who feel hurt who leave a party when there is a conflict. Power of definition means taking hurt feelings seriously; it doesn't imply guilt and is not about deciding who is right or wrong. It has nothing to do with vigilantism or police; it's a strategy for being capable of acting at all in a situation like a party and for supporting people who ask for it."

Still, partiality doesn't imply giving up your own autonomy. It's still OK to draw the line if the affected person's demands are in conflict with the boundaries of people on the support group or use means they aren't personally OK with.



## **Actively Intervening vs. Being a Support Person**

In the groups we've seen that define themselves as 'awareness teams', we've noticed that often people are actually attempting to fill two related but distinct roles.

1. The first of these, we'd say, is trying to actively intervene to create a safer space. This can mean walking around a space and confronting behaviour that you find problematic, keeping an eye out for people making trouble, telling people your mind.
2. The second role we see awareness teams often trying to take on is that of listening to the affected person, asking what they need and dealing with a specific encounter that someone told them about.

These two tasks are definitely closely linked, but it is important to recognize that different strategies are required for each of them. If you are walking around a party confronting trans\*phobic assholes and kicking out of the space the whole evening (not a bad thing!), it can often make it hard for someone to approach you if they've just had a rough experience and want to withdraw, drink a tea and talk to someone about what happened.

We have noticed in our own experience that, sometimes, trying to take on both these tasks at once can result in not succeeding very well at either. Creating role division within an awareness team can make sense, with some people focusing on creating a safer space for affected people to relax or talk about their experiences, while other members of the team try to undertake actively intervening within the party, confronting all the problematic behavior they observe and providing backup in case people need to be kicked out.

If you decide to focus more on the role of actively intervening, we also see a number of possible problems linked to this. The

people on the awareness team are people just like anybody else, so of course it can be that witnessing or experiencing a shitty situation at an event can cross the personal boundaries of awareness team members themselves. And, of course, you should confront those situations if you want to! But it could make sense to step out of your role as awareness team member for just a second and THEN confront whatever's going on, just as yourself: a justifiably pissed off and awesome individual standing up for their boundaries! Using your role in the awareness team to define for the whole party what's acceptable can end up leading to a hierarchical and weird dynamic. Unfortunately, we have personally seen a few situations where active intervention was nearly impossible to distinguish from plain old machoism. We'd rather not see even more white cis\* dudes stepping in in the role of the knight in shining armor! We don't necessarily want to say that it's bad to reserve the right to kick somebody out if you want to and we think there can be a fine line between showing solidarity and being a macho dick, and we're not totally sure how to navigate that line ourselves. We're just saying: please be careful with how you use the role of awareness and think about how some kinds of actions can actually end up trampling the agency of the affected person.

## **No Standard Operating Procedures:**

It makes a lot of sense to think through what possible good responses might be to concrete situations, but keep in mind that it's not possible to come up with a standardized response to all situations that might arise (e.g. if there is a drunk sexist the first step is confronting them verbally once, the next step is kicking them out, and the next step is...). Remember that in each situation you should shape your response according to the affected person's needs! The response to each situation will be unique to what the affected person would like to see happen. If we were to give you a concrete list of actions defining the 'perfect' response to problematic behavior, it would undermine the affected person's "power of definition" over what they would like to see happen. So, always ask the person affected first before you take actions after they've approached you. Ask what they need. For further steps, you can ask: "would you like us to...?" (see potential options below).

## **Mediation and Non-Moral Communication**

As we've said, we don't think that the role of an awareness team is to serve as a mediator between an affected person and a perpetrator but, rather, to support affected people in the response they would like. Nevertheless, sometimes what an affected person would like is just that: mediation. A party, in particular, is a difficult place to accomplish this effectively, so it's worth thinking about where and how you could go about doing so.

If you have the space and energy to try and educate someone on why you think what they're doing is fucked up (and the affected person thinks it's a good idea), there are certain communication skills and tactics that can be very useful. If your goal is to help someone to recognize the problem and to start taking steps towards changing it, it can definitely make the situation easier if you take a non-moralistic approach to communication. On the next page are some thoughts from a friend of ours on how to do so:

# SOME THOUGHTS ON BEING AN ALLY, COMMUNICATION, AND AWARENESS

by comet

If someone is shitty to you, you have no obligation at all to be polite back to that person, and especially not be obligated to “teach” them something about what is sexism (or however it was that you were being shat upon). Is it the job of the awareness team to act as an “ally”, to enlighten the offender on why what they did was wrong? I guess if that’s what the offended-person wanted to happen. Also if you personally have motivation to churn through it. Should that be the responsibility of more-aware people, or is that process up to the offender to figure out their own life? Do we want to “work” on this person, or just get them out of the fucking party?

What’s the difference between an “ally” and the “awareness team”? I guess an ally is how you respond in your own life when you witness oppressive behaviour. Like a little awareness team of one, walking around, every day. It takes courage to call someone out on what they said or did. How do we start?

Communication is key. If you see something negative happening, how can you communicate to the offender that what they’re doing is problematic? Imagine the difference between saying, “Your socks are dirty, do you need some soap?” and “Your feet are fuckin’ nasty you shitbag.” You are dealing with someone’s ego, and not everyone

enjoys being told that something they did was racist or sexist, or somehow oppressive (though others look forward to the opportunity to deconstruct themselves!). Not that I'm going to prioritize this person's ego when they just crossed someone else's boundaries (who is the real subject here,) it is still something to be aware of how people will react when you tell them things they don't want to hear.

Pointing a sharp finger across the room and shouting "You're a sexist!" in front of a big crowd of people is maybe not the most constructive way to approach the situation. Though it can be satisfying and necessary to get angry and shout, there can be more constructive ways of communication.

Being an ally can require a lot of time and patience.

As a member of the Awareness team, there may be times when you are speaking on behalf of another person; therefore it's even more vital to be able to clearly communicate their needs/ feelings, if they can't or don't want to directly. Also we must really understand what that person wants communicated, and not put our own spin on it. And we must say it in a way that the receiver will be able to hear and understand, and not feel personally attacked. If someone feels attacked, they will probably not cooperate and just start defending themselves, totally missing the point that their action has caused harm to others.



Here are some possible responses to situations that might make sense or be wished for:

\* **Confronting someone about their actions:** If the affected person doesn't feel the need for the perpetrator to leave and they are both open to dialogue, it can make sense to try to talk to them about what happened, explain why their behavior was unacceptable and demand that they keep that in mind when continuing to be at the party or make certain requests from them for what they should do if they want to continue attending the party.

\* **Kicking someone out:** This is really OK to do! It doesn't have to mean that you think someone is a bad person, it just means that they just need to go home for one evening of their life and it's really not a big deal. If someone acted oppressively and it would be uncomfortable for the affected person(s) to be in the same space for the rest of the evening, that is a good reason to kick someone out. Even if the affected person doesn't have the need for the person to leave, if you see someone acting in a way that suggests a pattern of oppressive behavior, it can also be good to kick that person out so that they do not continue this behavior towards others. Maybe the person is actually really nice but had way too many drinks, and is not even necessarily acting oppressively, but they are not really in control of themselves and are making people uncomfortable. In these situations, the person should just go home.

\* **Call for Backup:** If you aren't personally able to confront someone, because you are physically intimidated by them, or don't feel comfortable or whatever reason, that is also OK! But as an awareness team member you should try to commit to finding someone who will be able to handle this kind of confrontational situation should it arise. It doesn't have to be you, but if you think you might not be up for direct confrontation you should try to think in advance about friends and contact persons who you could go to if you need backup.

\* **Physical confrontation:** If someone is being physically aggressive and not responding to verbal requests for them to leave, it is possible that things could escalate. Again, be ready for that and have back up

\* In terms of whether physical retaliation against a perpetrator makes sense as a response in certain situations, we are not going to really comment on that here. We will leave it up to you whether that is something that is among the tasks of an awareness team (But maybe?). We will say, though, that you should probably not take it upon yourself to physically retaliate against someone if that was not explicitly wished for by the survivor.

\* **Ending the party or event:** if you no longer feel capable of dealing with the situation effectively, things have gotten out of control or you think that some basic minimum of safety and comfort hasn't/can't be achieved, it might be time to pull the plug. If you feel like a predatory or dangerous situation has developed, it is not your responsibility to perpetuate it so that some people can keep dancing.

Comics on D.I.Y. anti-racism from Zoë Robaey  
(<http://uneviedechien.tumblr.com/>)

On a train, minding my own business...



Someone decides to freshen up!



GIRL, your perfume stinks!  
I know right! It smells ARABIC.



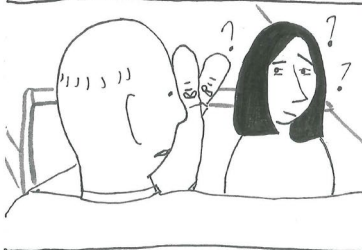
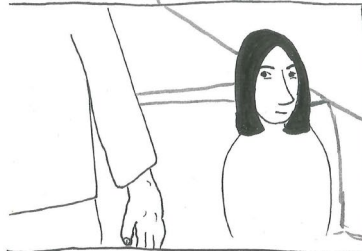
You know, it's Really  
offensive what you  
just said.



S...ay...



IN THE U-BAHN...



in den Städten  
Zoe 2014

# PERSONAL RESPONSE

## FROM A FRIEND

I was at a week-long camp, and there was an awareness team. During the first plenums of the week, there was a need to create this working-group, and anyone interested in helping would join it. There was a tent set up at the far end of the campground, as a Safer Space, it looked very cozy and inviting. Though there was a sign there that made it clear that this isn't just a chilling-out tent, but a specific awareness/ safer space tent, so please only use it if you need it.

The camp had an open structure, where people could give feedback daily, and each evening the notes were announced over the mic to the group. Sometimes the awareness team would make announcements, like encouraging publicly that a certain person who was asked to leave please consider doing so. It seemed like that person never left though.

On one of the last evenings, when the anonymous feedback notes were being read out loud, one of them was something like "I feel embarrassed to even say this because I don't think it would be taken seriously here, but I feel uncomfortable when men are walking around without shirts on." Then immediately after this was said, a group of dudes were laughing out loud in the back or made some comments. I was completely shocked and disgusted. Someone just expressed their discomfort, and it was met with ridicule. It was a big crowd of people here, would I stand up in front of everyone?

But I was thinking, "if I don't say something, that means I think this behavior is acceptable- I have to say something now!" So I got up and took the mic: "The fact that you're laughing just proves this person right. They shared their uncomfortable feelings and the least you can do is listen and take it seriously, and check your privilege for being able to laugh. If we're trying to be "radical activists" making this camp a safer space, laughing at someone's discomfort is not an appropriate response!"

There was a lot of positive feedback to what I'd said, and the people on the awareness team were really grateful for it. I'm proud of myself for saying what I did in that context.

Another thing I saw at this camp, and many other camps too, were separate campground/ sleeping areas depending on your needs: "substance-free/ calm zone", "party zone", "women-lesbian-trans\* only zone", "family zone", etc. Of course, there is no guarantee the area will remain that way, but it can be a great help to gauge where you would feel safest. The party-people probably wouldn't care where they slept, but for others they really want/ need a specific area to feel comfortable and safe.

### **MORE POSSIBLE RESPONSES FROM OUR FRIEND, X:**

- calling in vs. calling out.. psst, come here, I have a zine for you (on the kind oppression they reproduced.) Offer a chance to learn, take home reading material... A.T. zine distro at events?
- hand them a little flyer, "you are receiving this because..." (for example: "what to do when someone tells you you crossed their boundaries")
- find one of their friends, explain the situation, maybe they can help in a group intervention. The offender might listen more to their friends than to a stranger (you on the A.T.)

what are other possible responses? Brainstorm:

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## **More Considerations in Serious Situations**

### **Transformative Justice Processes**

If something really serious happens, it isn't necessarily the role of an awareness team to bottom-line organizing a longer term process of transformative justice. If the survivor is interested in such a process it is possible to offer to be involved, though. Try to think a bit beforehand about whether, in such a situation, you would have the capacity to take part in this kind of longer-term process and what role you might be able to play.

### **Police Involvement**

This is a thorny issue and you should definitely decide in advance how you will respond. What would you do if an affected person told you that they had just had a violent experience with someone and, in order to feel safe, they now wanted to call the police or that you call the police for them? You may totally reject police involvement when it comes to your own life, but things get a bit more complicated when other people's needs are involved. However, while the needs and safety of the affected person should be an awareness team's first priority, you also need to think about the needs and safety of other people who may be affected by a police visit. The threat that the police represent, especially to anyone who they don't immediately perceive as white, straight and male, is very real. If you have decided that, for you, police involvement is a possible response, you should at an absolute minimum communicate that to your guests so they can decide whether they want to be there or not: knowing that there is a possibility that you may call the police will make the space clearly unsafe for some possible guests.

### **Being a support person for someone in crisis**

Be ready to act as a support person if someone had a really rough experience and may be in crisis. Try to think about how you might support someone in



this situation: Listen to what they say, try to find a less stressful space for them to be (ask whether they want to be alone or with someone else), make sure they have a way to get home, ask what needs they have, maybe have some tea or chocolate to offer them, follow up and check in with them afterwards.



## **Being a support person for someone who has had too much to drink / taken too much of something**

We'd make similar points to those we suggested for being a support person for someone in crisis more generally. Also consider here at what point you should seek medical attention for the person. If you can't judge whether someone is really in danger try to find someone with more medical knowledge.

... Do you have a First Aid Kit and know how to use it?

## **Aftercare**

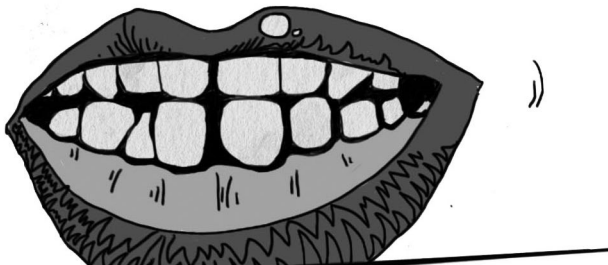
If you are not able to commit to support after the time frame of the party has passed, make sure you can provide contact information for people who can. To find support groups in Berlin for survivors of sexualized violence, please see the Resource section at the end of the zine.

# The Stigma of Speaking Up

## and How to Minimize the Threshold

Asking for help can be hard. It should not only be the responsibility of the affected person to speak up; we all should work to create a supportive atmosphere in our spaces and break the mainstream stigma that asking for help is a sign of weakness. Fuck that! Knowing what your needs are is a very empowering feeling. Being able to express them takes courage, and is worth it in the end for your own well-being. It's okay to ask for what you need. It's okay to express yourself and share with others what you are feeling. You don't have to suffer alone. The awareness team can be where you can safely share your feelings.

Because it takes courage to come forward sometimes, the awareness team should be as welcoming as possible, and aware of certain barriers that might make someone uncomfortable to approach them.



# How Accessible is the Awareness Team?

## Who is on the awareness team?

Think about the way in which the socialization and privileges of people on the awareness team might make it harder for people in other situations to approach them. If you notice that the awareness team is composed of entirely white, cis, able-bodied men, it's likely that it will mostly contribute to the safety and comfort of ... white, cis, able-bodied men. Since this group is comparatively shielded from fucked-up social dynamics as it is, you might want to think about how to make your space safer and more fun for other people as well.

## Language

It's not always realistically possible that all the people on an awareness shift will speak all the languages necessary to communicate with everyone in a space in an effective and open way, but you can try to find people to help in case translation is needed. What languages do you plan on being able to deal with? What does this say about the group of people who is expected/welcomed in your space?

## Ableism

Is the space barrier-free? This is something that will be decided already when the space for the party is chosen and if you are just showing up on that evening there is not much you can do about it one way or the other. But if the space is not barrier-free, are there ways you could make movement easier for people with mobility issues? For example, maybe talk to people at the door, if there's steps in front, to make sure they are keeping an eye out that people get support if they need help making it up the stairs.

## **Which Types of Oppression Get Talked About?**

Often, on awareness teams, we find ourselves making lists of oppressive behaviors. It's worth asking yourself what makes the list and what gets left out (and why that might be). Especially at parties, sexist behavior can be so overwhelming that it's hard to deal with anything else. But at events that are almost exclusively white (for example), it's hard to argue that sexism is the only problem. Equally, every form of power and privilege is specific – dealing with sexism won't eliminate homophobia or trans\*phobia, however deeply and tightly connected they are.

## **Your Behavior**

Think about your own actions and behavior, as well. Where are you? What are you doing? Some people may find it difficult to approach someone from the awareness team if they are clearly partying with their friends. Holding yourself a bit outside can make this easier. You can do this by setting up a special booth or stand, or even while just walking around. Make sure, one way or another, that people can tell who you are and what you are there for. And don't forget that drinking and taking other substances can put off people who otherwise might want to speak with the awareness team (for instance, about problems they have been having with someone who was drunk or high...). Emotionally (or even physically) intense situations can arise and you want to make sure you have your wits about you. Commit to being sober for your awareness shift.

## **Alcohol**

We just mentioned this, but it's a problem that always comes up so we'd like to emphasize it again. Alcohol and other substances are very present in most party settings: there's lots of reasons why, in a situation where people basically come together in order to get 'fucked up', a dynamic can be created where a lot of people feel extremely alienated and unsafe from

the very beginning. As an awareness team you should do your best to work against this and to be as available as possible for people who are uncomfortable with this situation. Please stay sober if you are doing an awareness shift!

And... stay sober even (and especially) when it's late: it's hard to stay up until dawn sometimes, but, in our experience, the later things get (and the drunker your guests are) the more likely it is that shit will happen. A problem we've seen again and again is that when people sign up to do a shift from 4 to 6 in the morning, often they end up drinking, too, before their shift finishes or even begins. It's goot to try to avoid a situation where the people most likely to have to provide support are the least equipped to deal with it.

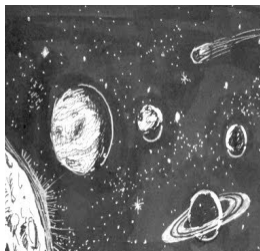
### **Who is Aware of the Awareness Team?**

Awareness structures are still something new, and not everyone may be familiar with them, how to use them and what they are for. Make sure you find a direct and accessible way to communicate what you are doing and how it works. Often people make a flyer or a poster which explains things, but there are many ways to get your point across. Be creative! Talking to people also helps. If you are in a situation where there's more time, like at a camp, it can make sense to do a workshop. Be careful about the language you use: being overly academic or jargony can exclude a lot of people, but a quick 'no racism, no sexism' can make it seem like you don't care about less visible forms of oppression.

Awareness is also a part of a larger effort to build up and live out community accountability. We want to make anti-oppression work part of everyday life, not just by awareness teams, but by entire communities. It's important to connect what you are doing on one night or weekend to the on-going struggle to take care of and work with each other. Raising awareness about awareness, whether through workshops, conversations or other means, makes awareness work easier and helps make these connections.

# Space

## Considerations



In What Space are you Having the Party?

If you are holding the party in a space that isn't yours, this can mean that you don't have control over certain aspects of the space. Try to be clear about what decisions you can make, and what decisions are taken by other groups (owners, organizers, etc.).

### Space for Calm and Retreat

Even if the whole party can't really claim to be a safe space, it can be a good idea to create some areas in the party where people can withdraw to if they need some space, want get away from substance consumption or just take a break for a bit.

Think about whether it's possible to take one room of the party as a calm and substance-free space. Knowing that there's a space where people can be alone if they need to or space where they can be only around people who are sober can make the decision to come to a party in the first place a lot easier.

# Setting Rules about the Use of the Space

Although it's probably unlikely that you'll be able to get all party-goers to come together and take a consensus about how people should behave at the party, as the organizers you can consider what needs you have from your guests and try to visibly communicate these needs to people entering the party. In theory, at least, people should not enter the space if they are not willing to act according to these guidelines. Give people a flyer when they come in, be ready to explain it to people, try to start conversations about it, hang it up in the hallway for people to read in the line to get in, then post them again throughout the party (in places like bathrooms, for example, where people might have a second to read through them). Unfortunately, at least in our experience, you may have to keep these space agreements on the shorter side if you are realistically hoping that people will actually read through them.

## Possible things to ask your guests:

- \* Please be aware of your own actions and how they affect others. In particular, be aware of how alcohol and drug use can affect your actions and your ability to judge others boundaries.

\* Practice good consent. If you are not sure where someone else's boundaries are, always ask! Don't assume things about peoples' gender, sexuality, race, personal history, etc.

\* Please be in touch with us if you see situations developing that you think we should keep an eye on.

\* If we call you out on your behavior, please be ready to accept criticism, to critically consider your own actions and take accountability for them. Critique is not necessarily meant as a personal attack!

\* Please recognize that tobacco use can be exclusive. Respect the smoking policies & only smoke outside or in the designated smoking areas.

\* Although we are very eager to help where help is wanted, the awareness team is not intended to be the only means of confronting situations or to replace personal accountability. If, for example, you hear your friend making a sexist comment and you feel comfortable saying something yourself, please do call them out on it!

The list could be much longer... make your own!



# Some more practical considerations...

## Continuity between shifts

Make sure you communicate to the people on the awareness shift before/after you. If you encounter someone acting oppressively, it's unlikely to be an isolated incident. Actions are usually part of larger patterns of behavior. For that reason, it's especially important to have good communication between people who are doing awareness at different times and keep people up to date on what's going on. So check in with people at the start of your shift and make sure you have an overview, be aware of which people there may have been issues with during other parts of the evening. It's also possible to keep a log.

## Communication to Other People in the Party

It can be a good idea to have ongoing communication not just with other people on the awareness team but also with the party organizers and people doing other shifts. People at the bar or the door can also keep an eye on the situation and, if there's a security shift separate from awareness, it can make sense to work together.

**Decide whether you will be set up in one spot or mobile (or both, if you have enough people):** As we've said, having a quiet space set aside for the awareness team and anyone

who wants to talk to them can make you more approachable. On the other hand, separating yourself from the event entirely can make it difficult to keep an overview of what's going on and what the mood is like. Taking a walk around the party now and then can help. You can also ask members of the awareness team who are not currently on shift to keep an eye out and report back if they notice something strange.

Another possible strategy is for the awareness team to walk around the party the whole time. This makes it easier to intervene in situations that you see arising, but it can also make it more difficult for party-goers to identify and approach you. Try to figure out inside your group to what extent you prefer to actively step in to situations you think might be going in a bad direction, and to what extent you want to simply make yourself available to be approached.

## **Be visible!**

Especially if you decide to be a mobile awareness team, it's important that people are able to find you. Consider making an unusual garment: a strange golden hat, wearing matching glittering vests or something in that vein: Wearing mildly ridiculous costumes can make it more likely that people will approach you, too.

## Meeting Beforehand

Try to find a time where you can meet with everyone doing an awareness shift before the actual event. It's good to check that you're on the same page and to come to a general agreement on what sort of actions you want the awareness team to take and how to communicate that to the guests. At such a meeting you might also want to provide skill-sharing, explaining the concept of awareness and talking about your past experiences, to people who haven't previously done awareness team shifts but would like to.

If the awareness team is a separate group from the general organizers of the event, it's good if you clearly communicate your plans to them beforehand. If you want to reserve the right to pull the plug on a party that's gone bad, for example, you probably need to discuss that with the organizers.

## Meeting afterward

We haven't personally managed, at any of the events we worked on awareness so far, to implement a 100% perfect spectacular awareness concept that met everybody's needs and made the space feel as safe as it possibly could. This will also never happen... Making our communities safer and more accountable is a never-ending process: meeting afterward to check on what worked and what didn't and to figure out how you can do it better next time can help you fuck up less in the future. Do your best but don't be too hard on yourself if you notice that wasn't good enough. Debrief and make sure that you are extending your amazing support skills to each other, too, not just to others!

# Awareness in Other Contexts

We ended up talking mostly about awareness in party contexts in this zine, but it's definitely not a concept limited to that situation. When trying to transfer these ideas to another context, three important factors to keep in mind, as far as what an awareness team can hope to accomplish are:

**The Time-Frame:** How long is this event supposed to last, and what sort of shifts can you fill? Will you be available 24 hours a day (for a multi-day event)? Is the awareness group a permanent part of your community (for example, in a living collective)? What does that mean? How can you avoid burning out as a group?

**The Space:** Do you have somewhere to set up? How much control of the space do you have? Are there particularly risky or dangerous areas?

**The Community:** is the group you are trying to do awareness work with a 'community' that has a shared interest in working together and the possibility to come to collective agreements? Is it just a group of somewhat random people coming together to dance because they all like breakcore? This makes a big difference in the possibilities you have as an awareness team. and what you can hope to accomplish.

## SPECIFIC CONTEXTS IN WHICH YOU MIGHT WANT AN AWARENESS TEAM:

- \* a week-long Action Camp
- \* a weekend event
- \* a one-night party
- \* a collective meal (voku/food not bombs), or event at a bar (soli-tresen)
- \* a collective house (long term/on-going awareness)
- \* a club (a guerilla awareness team?)
- \* a big music festival (Fusion? Can you have an awareness team for 40,000 people? Why not? Does it only work for small groups? Where is the limit?)
- \* a gallery opening
- \* a demonstration (at the Mad Pride, they passed out sheets with information to everyone, and the A.T. had colored shirts on, at different points in the demo)

There are so many opportunities to be aware!!

We gathered a few thoughts from friends on their experiences doing and engaging with awareness at political camps.

## personal response from a friend

I was once at a weekend-camp on gender-issues, I felt a very positive atmosphere from the people there. I was grateful for their safer-space room provided by the awareness team. When I arrived, I felt very fucked up from a bad hitchhiking experience, earlier that day I was abandoned in the middle of nowhere for refusing to have sex with a male driver. I held it together for the rest of the day, but by the time I got to the camp I was an emotional wreck. The organizers had made clear in their program that there was a quiet room you could go to, if you just ask someone for the key. It was the first time I experienced a room like that at an event. I found the person to ask for the key, they showed me the room and didn't ask questions why. I stayed there for hours and let myself feel all the things I was feeling, and not try to hide awkwardly in a public setting.

I am grateful for this room. Even so, my reason for using it was not triggered by a confrontation that happened during the camp itself, but rather outside of it. I think this shows that the need for awareness/ safer spaces can expand beyond the frame of what happens at an event, because maybe you get triggered even when no "bad thing" has actually happened in that space. Sometimes I just get sad, and want a special place to go and feel my feelings.. but still want to be involved in the party somehow, and not necessarily go home immediately to escape it. Parties can be intense, loud music and yelling all the time. Being in a quiet space for a little bit can help me get focused, or be able to enjoy the event more. It's okay to take breaks, it's okay to chill out for a while.

## **SOME NOTES ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PARTY AWARENESS AND CAMP AWARENESS BY Y AND Z**

If you decide to install an AT at the camp you're organizing or if you are thinking of being part of an AT in a camp (both of which are awesome) you should think beforehand about which differences may appear within the different contexts. Here are some points we collected from the experiences we have with being part of an AT at a camp or being part of the camp-orga-group.

What obviously distinguishes a camp from a party is the time frame in which it takes place. Whereas a party normally doesn't last longer than a night, a camp will last some days to weeks. This means that the AT also has to be 'active' for a longer time. Points you should think about concerning this are, for example: how many people are in the AT? or: how do we arrange the shifts?

Not only the length differs, also the physical space is bigger when it comes to a camp structure. This can have advantages, for example that there is probably the possibility to have an extra space/room/tent for the AT which could also serve as safer chill out space. The challenges for the AT might be that you have to decide if you want to be everywhere at the same time', if

you have enough people in the team to attend all the different buildings, tents, spaces or if it makes more sense to have a visible marked space where people can find you. At some activist camps there might also be workshops on the topics of awareness/safer space/(anti-)sexism/(anti-)oppression, so you can think about taking part in these or also about contacting the persons giving these workshops about whether they want you to take part in a supportive role. If there are no workshops scheduled: think about providing one!

Another main point we want to mention is the role of alcohol. Whereas it is 'normal' in most of the parties we attend that people drink alcohol, at a camp it could come to the point where the whole group defines some rules for the consumption of alcohol (e.g. not until a certain time, not during plenary/workshops, only in certain spaces...). Unfortunately, if these rules are agreed on it is often the AT which has to take care that everyone sticks to them. Try to communicate openly to the plenary that you are not the 'beer (and smoking) police' and that everyone should feel responsible to advise people on how they act.

So one of the possibilities of camp awareness is that you have the chance to create community accountability and, with that, the role of camp awareness can (also) be seen as an informative one (in addition to the



supportive role). Not only this but also the longer shifts might result in a heavier commitment felt by the AT persons. Still, the advantage can be seen in the chance to provide long-term information.

Keep in mind that at camps oppression can occur in different ways. Oppressive behavior not only takes place in social interaction, it can also affect decision making processes (e. g. dominant behavior of single persons in plenaries). In a worst case you could find an interconnection between hierarchy and oppression when it comes to oppressive acting of an organizing person. Also you could be confronted with conflicting roles and interests between AT and organizers.

With different manifestations of oppression you will be confronted with a different degree of confrontation: whereas in a party situation the last (often the only) solution is the kicking out of a person behaving shitty, this will maybe not immediately be the case in a camp atmosphere. It might be the more adequate task to apply long-term mediation between conflict groups/persons.

Since most political camps potentially face external repression, participants can face difficult situations that could lead to needed emotional support or trauma support. It can be decided that trauma support functions as a separate team from the AT; if not, the AT could take on this role when

these situations come to pass.

Besides this, you might have a more consistent group process within the AT also : depending on the length of the camp you should take part in opening/ mid-time/closing plenaries. Within the group you should have an internal evaluation process/check-ins with your group members. Since being part of the AT sometimes can change your view on the whole camp, make sure that everyone in the AT still feels good. Sometimes the AT itself is the backup structure for the members.

Also, a camp preparation process usually takes longer than a party and can be intense and stressful. Thereby AT structures can be useful during the preparation of camps as a way to support anti-oppressive processes during the preparation and normalize the AT in the lead up to the camp.

We want to mention here, that these points concerning camp awareness should be seen in addition to the notes on party awareness. Be aware that also in camps a party situation can take place in the evening and there might be alcohol consumption in the evenings (depending on group agreements). Think about extra shifts for the evenings and make sure that people stay sober!

# Abbreviated Resources

Here are a few resources we like! For a much longer list, which we will also keep on updating, see: <http://awareness.noblogs.org/resources/>

## On Awareness

- \* **Awareness is Awesome:** Texte und Gedanken zu Awareness (<http://awareness.blogsport.eu/>)

### **Heiligendamm Antisexist Contact and Awarenessgroup:**

- \* Die antisexist contact and awarenessgroup stellt sich vor ([http://gipfelsoli.org/Home/Heiligendamm\\_2007/G8\\_2007\\_deutsch/2\\_Jahre\\_Vorbereitung/Arbeitsgruppen/antisexist\\_awareness\\_group/1037.html](http://gipfelsoli.org/Home/Heiligendamm_2007/G8_2007_deutsch/2_Jahre_Vorbereitung/Arbeitsgruppen/antisexist_awareness_group/1037.html))
- \* Auswertungsbericht der Antisexist Contact and Awareness Group (<http://asbb.blogsport.de/2008/07/23/auswertungsbericht-der-antisexist-contact-and-awareness-group/>)

## On Creating Safer Spaces and Community Accountability

- \* **Philly's Pissed** (<http://www.phillyspissed.net/>)  
Thoroughly awesome! You can find zines here for free download on topics of: consent, What To Do When You've Been Called Out, supporting survivors, community response to sexual assault, men unlearning rape, and similar themes.
- \* **INCITE! Resources** (<http://www.incite-national.org/page/online-readings>)

- \* Philly Stands Up (<http://phillystandsup.wordpress.com/>)
- \* The Fundamental Requirements for Organized Safer Space (<http://floaker.net/2013/03/31/organised-safer-space-2/>)
- \* Creative Interventions Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence (<http://www.creative-interventions.org/tools/toolkit/>)
- \* Implementing Safer Spaces - Ideas for how to put words into action (<http://coalactionscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Safer-Spaces-Ideas-for-Implementation.pdf>)

**More:** <http://communityaccountability.wordpress.com/resources/>

## General Awesomeness

Towards a Less Fucked Up World

(<http://www.sproutdistro.com/catalog/zines/organizing/towards-less-fucked-world/>)

Witch-Hunt: Addressing Mental Health and Confronting Sexual Assault in Activist Communities

(<http://www.phillyspissed.net/sites/default/files/ZINE%20Witch%20Hunt.pdf>)

Learning Good Consent

(<http://zinelibrary.info/learning-good-consent>)

Ask First Zine

(<http://zinelibrary.info/ask-first>)

What to do when someone tells you that you violated their boundaries, made them feel uncomfortable, or committed assault

(<http://www.phillyspissed.net/sites/default/files/what%20to%20do%20when%20someone%20tells%20you.pdf>)

The Privilege of Politeness

(<http://theangryblackwoman.com/2008/02/12/the-privilege-of-politeness/>)

A Compilation of Anti-Oppression Resources

([http://www.sproutdistro.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/compilation\\_anti\\_oppression\\_resources.pdf](http://www.sproutdistro.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/compilation_anti_oppression_resources.pdf))

Why Inclusionary Language Matters

([http://meloukhia.net/2009/09/why\\_inclusionary\\_language\\_matters/](http://meloukhia.net/2009/09/why_inclusionary_language_matters/))

White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

(<http://amptoons.com/blog/files/mcintosh.html>)

The White Anti-Racist Is an Oxymoron: An Open Letter to “White Anti-Racists”

(<http://racetraitor.org/nopper.html>)

Racism 101: Why asking POC to explain is a problem

(<http://racismschool.tumblr.com/post/15823127398/why-asking-poc-to-explain-is-a-problem>)

Ableism/Language

(<http://www.autistichoya.com/p/ableist-words-and-terms-to-avoid.html>)

Aus.Schluss - Barrierefrei veranstalten!

(<http://akmob.kulturrevolution.de/aus.schluss-barrierefrei-veranstalten.pdf>)

Barrier-free Event Spaces in Berlin

(<http://www.ak-mob.org/2011/11/04/barrierefreie-veranstaltungsorte-in-berlin/>)

When Language Runs Dry

(<http://chronicpainzine.blogspot.de/>)

The Icarus Project

(<http://www.theicarusproject.net/>)

Not Yr Cister Press

(<http://notyrcisterpress.tumblr.com/>)

Activist Trauma

(<https://www.activist-trauma.net/>)

Game Over? No Way!: Politically Active  
without Burning Out

([http://skillsharing.net/?page\\_id=326](http://skillsharing.net/?page_id=326))

Anti-Sexismus Reloaded

# Berlin Support for Survivors of Sexualized Violence

Ask Gerd\_a - contact: ask\_gerd\_a riseup.  
net

The anti-sexist collective Gerd\_a (ASK Gerd\_a) offers support for survivors of sexual violence and sexist discrimination in Berlin. This support work is based on the principles of Definitionsmacht (power of self-definition) and Parteilichkeit (partiality towards or commitment to the survivor).

Transformative Justice -

<http://www.transformativejustice.eu>

We work to build community accountability for sexual violence in Berlin. That means, developing community-wide co-ordinated responses to sexual violence that include: prevention education, survivor support, perpetrator accountability, and an overall commitment to anti-oppression. We use models of transformative justice, or a focus on collective transformation rather than individual guilt or punishment, to guide our response to perpetrators and communities which condone abuse and violence.

LesMigras - <http://www.lesmigras.de/>

Wildwasser - <http://www.wildwasser.de/>

Lara- <http://www.lara-berlin.de/>

Support Groups in Other Cities

DEFMA - <http://defma.blogspot.de/>

